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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL

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SUBJECT: GETTING PASTOR TRUONG OUT OF THE ASYLUM

Ref: A. HCMC 581; B. Hanoi 1379

This is a joint Hanoi-Ho Chi Minh City cable

1. (SBU) Summary: Although Mission has seen some positive movement in the case of Baptist Pastor Than Van Truong -- his hospital recently reportedly determined that he no longer needs mental health care -- he nonetheless remains confined. The Ambassador will raise his case with Vice Minister of Public Security Nguyen Van Huong in a meeting on June 13. Depending on the outcome, Mission may request that the Department call in the Vietnamese Ambassador or another suitably high-ranking official to discuss this matter. End Summary.

2. (SBU) On June 3, we spoke with the lawyer of Than Van Truong. Pastor Truong has been involuntarily committed to a mental hospital in Dong Nai Province since October 2004. It appears that Truong is being held for the peaceful expression of his religious and political views (Ref A.) Following multiple interventions by HCMC polooff with Dong Nai officials, a letter from the CG to the Chairman of the provincial People's Committee and a demarche by DCM to MFA in Hanoi, Truong's lawyer told us that his client had been "declared sane" by a panel of doctors in the mental hospital. (Note: The Ambassador also raised Truong's case with Vice Foreign Minister Vu Dzong on June 9. Ref B. End Note.) However, the attorney was concerned that the hospital is pressing Truong to sign a document prior to his release affirming that he has been cured of his mental illness before they release him. The attorney said that he would not recommend that Truong sign such a document.

3. (SBU) On June 9 we were able to contact Dr. Hoang Trong Tam (strictly protect), who until recently was Truong's attending physician in the mental hospital. Tam told us that, following our May 25 visit to the hospital; he had been transferred to another ward and no longer treats Truong. Tam stated that the hospital had decided to medically reevaluate Truong independent of any guidance from the Dong Nai Prosecutor's Office. The review concluded that Truong is well enough to be released and receive "treatment" at home. (The Hospital Director told us on May 25 that the hospital had stopped administering the anti-psychotic Haloperidol, the only treatment he had been receiving.) Tam said that there is concern among Dong Nai authorities that Truong has not abandoned his strong views on religion and politics, but there is increasing pressure on the hospital to find a face-saving solution to this case. In this regard, the Director of the Hospital has been asked to travel to Hanoi to explain the case. Tam has been instructed to prepare a report on the medical reevaluation for the Director.

4. (SBU) On June 9, we also spoke with Ho Van Nam, Deputy Chief Prosecutor of Dong Nai Province. The Deputy Prosecutor told us that it is up to the hospital to notify the prosecutor's office of any change in Truong's condition. We replied that our understanding was that the Prosecutor had to initiate the formal legal review process in order to secure Truong's release. We asked if the Prosecutor had submitted such a request. Nam refused to answer or to discuss the case with us further on the phone. Separately, the Dong Nai Office of External Relations told us that it had no new information about the case nor had it heard anything from the Ministry of Public Security regarding our requests for additional information on Truong's mental condition.

5. (SBU) Comment: We are encouraged that the hospital has performed a review of Truong's case and reportedly has determined that further stay in the mental hospital is not needed. However, more worrying are the Prosecutor's apparent stalling on requesting a legal reexamination of the case as well as the demand that Truong admit to having been mentally ill as a precondition for his release. Should Truong sign he would be vulnerable to a declaration that he had "relapsed" at some future date. The Ambassador will raise Truong's case with Vice Minister of Public Security Nguyen Van Huong on June 13. Depending on the outcome of this discussion, Mission may request the Department call in the SRV Ambassador or another suitably high-ranking official

to reinforce our case with HCMC-drafted points. End
Comment.

MARINE